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ABSTRACT

The Cooperative Alliance, funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 1990, is a partnership among three agencies--Kent State University (KSU), Cleveland Public Schools' (CPS) Center for School Improvement, and International Business Machines (IBM) EdQuest Corporation--to enhance educational planning for minority and/or educationally disadvantaged students in both regular and gifted K-12 education. This paper presents findings of a 3-year study that examined participants' perspectives about the development of the educational partnership. In the third year of the study, interviews were conducted with all 16 members of the partnership's advisory body, the Joint Partnership Advisory Council (JPAC). Conclusions are that, first, an educational partnership must focus on helping partners to understand the project and to learn from each other. Second, the following key issues remained constant--careful communication, strong leadership, diversity, and focus on project goals. Third, partnerships must learn to accommodate change. Fourth, participants' concerns were related to their partnership roles. Finally, assessments of the partnership process should be built on the assumption that meaning is socially constructed and context dependent. Partnership designs should acknowledge that participants' perceptions will change as the partnership matures. One figure and two tables are included. Contains 21 references. (LMI)

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A Three-Year Examination of Participants' Perspectives of Educational Partnerships

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Our nation is currently involved in a massive effort to reform education. Many initiatives (e.g., Goals 2000) promote school-business-university-community partnerships as vehicles for achieving significant reform. Consequently, educational partnerships have grown at a rapid rate since the mid-1980s. One recent survey found that 51% of school districts in the U.S., serving over 65% of the school-aged population, had partnership programs (National Association of Partners in Education, 1991).

Although commitment to the development of educational partnerships appears to be significant, the processes by which partners work together to influence educational practice is only beginning to be studied systematically and comprehensively. Project descriptions or evaluations of discrete components of partnership projects currently encompass most of the available literature. These commonly include lists of characteristics of partnerships or descriptions of conditions that promote effective partnerships, such as (a) potential problems (Otterbourg & Timpane, 1986); (b) generic elements (Grobe, 1990); (c) elements of collaboration (Caplan, 1988); (d) characteristics of interorganizational relations (Ash, 1989); and (e) salient themes of partnership arrangements (DelPizzo, 1990). Environments conducive to establishing partnerships include availability of seed money and organizational norms that reward collaboration (Intriligator, 1986). Strong leadership and careful communication and planning are also key elements of successful partnerships (Shaklee, Padak, Barton, & Johnson, 1991).

Much of this work assumes that partnerships are static entities and that the conditions for effectiveness are stable. The possibility that partnerships may evolve has not yet received much attention in the scholarly literature. Grobe (1990) suggests that a "partnership, like change, is a process, not an event" (p. 5), which occurs "in the minds of participants" (Boyd, Duning, Gomez, Hetzel, King, Patrick, & Whitaker, 1992, p. 14). Pazant (1992) adds that partnerships must involve "reaching complete initial agreement on the meaning of collaboration," which can "make the difference between success and failure" (p. 141). The partnership concept itself, especially with regard to the relationships among partners, then, may change over time. Others have identified expectations (Fullan & Miles, 1992; Grobe, 1990) or attention to institutionalization (Fullan & Miles, 1992; Lieberman, 1992; VanDeVen, 1976) as areas that may change as a partnership matures.

Clearly, research is necessary to understand the development and maintenance of educational partnerships. Additionally, since much of the extant literature describes partnerships from an agency or organizational view, the personal perspective is also missing from the literature. Descriptions of the partnership process from the perspectives of persons engaged in them provide a sociocultural lens for examining partnerships.

This study extends our previous work (Borthwick, Padak, Shaklee, & Peck, 1992; Padak, Peck, Borthwick, & Shaklee, 1993),

which has involved the exploration of partners' perspectives over extended involvement in a particular partnership effort, the Cooperative Alliance for Gifted Education (Shaklee, Barton, Padak, & Johnson, 1990). In Borthwick et al. (1992), we studied partners' initial perceptions of critical issues for success of a partnership, gleaned from an interview study conducted after only a few months of participation. Padak et al. (1993) added data from interviews conducted after 18 months of partnership participation and explored changes in persons' perspectives as they gained experience with the project and each other. This study adds data from a third year of interviews with the same individuals. Taken together, the three action research studies provide a three-year view of participants' perspectives about the educational partnership in which they were involved.

In the pages that follow, we first briefly describe the partnership project. Summaries of results from the Year 1 study (Borthwick et al., 1992) and the Year 2 study (Padak, et al., 1993) are then provided. Next, we present methodological information and results from the Year 3 study. The paper concludes with a comparison of results across the three studies and the delineation of a model of the partnership process.

The Cooperative Alliance for Gifted Education

The Cooperative Alliance, funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 1990, focuses on the development of effective partnerships to facilitate high quality educational programs for

tomorrow's technology-based communities. It utilizes the strengths and resources of three agencies, Kent State University (KSU), Cleveland Public Schools' Center for School Improvement (CPS), and International Business Machines, EduQuest Corporation (IBM), to enhance educational programming for minority and/or educationally disadvantaged students in both regular and gifted child education. Currently 24 teachers, grades 1 - 12, and approximately 1500 students participate in activities supported by the Cooperative Alliance.

Multiple partnerships are embedded within the project (see Figure 1). An important one, the Joint Partnership Advisory Council (JPAC), was created to have an integral and active role in all project components. The JPAC consists of representatives from the three partners, community agencies (e.g., museums, libraries, public television), and businesses in the greater Cleveland area. The local community college and the state Board of Regents are also represented on the JPAC. Rather than simply providing financial assistance for the project, the JPAC serves as the advisory body for the formulation and implementation of specific plans to meet goals and objectives, for problem solving, and for ongoing project evaluation.

Critical Issues: Year One

JPAC representatives are interviewed annually as part of the evaluation plan for the Cooperative Alliance. Analysis of 22 interviews conducted after several months of partnership activity

(Borthwick et al., 1992) yielded three major domains that together described informants' perceptions of the partnership process: definitions of "partnership," critical features for success, and potential results of the partnership effort. Results related to the second domain, which is pertinent to the present study, revealed four categories of factors associated with successful partnerships: people and relationships, investment and understanding, the partnership framework, and resources. Each is summarized briefly below.

Effective partners have "personality, chemistry, and charisma..., [are] stakeholders," and have expertise related to the focus of the project. Moreover, informants believed that effective partners had both power within their own organizations and the "ability to impact on the community."

Relationships among partners were also viewed as critical, particularly with regard to how well people know one another. Informants agreed that productive relationships take time to develop and are influenced by continual interactions, careful communication, and efforts to understand differences. These allowed trust to form; informants believed trust to be the basis of effective partnership relationships.

The "investment and understanding" category focused chiefly on opinions and attitudes about project goals. Investment was perceived as occurring on both the personal and organizational levels. Understanding included the need to understand the project itself as well as individual roles in its accomplishment.

The third major category contained informants' descriptions of effective functioning within a partnership. Informants valued authentic participation, which they believed to be dependent upon time and effective leadership. Workable processes for making decisions and resolving differences were also viewed as critical. Occasional dissension was expected, for both personal and organizational reasons, so comfort with conflict, ability to compromise, and willingness to negotiate were seen as important. A final critical ingredient was that partners expect change and that the partnership framework be flexible enough to accommodate change.

Finally, informants talked about resources, some financial but more frequently the need for human resources. Professional expertise, facilities, and materials were also mentioned.

Critical Issues: Year Two

At the conclusion of the Borthwick et al. (1992) study, we acknowledged the possibility that informants' perceptions of critical features for partnership success might change as they gained familiarity with the Cooperative Alliance and each other. The Padak et al. (1993) study was designed to explore this hypothesis, as it focused upon interview data from 15 individuals who had been involved with the project for 18 months. Analysis of interview data yielded six domains, each of which is described briefly below.

Comments within the first domain, partnership framework, accounted for about 1/3 of all data, which suggests the overall importance of this issue for informants. One category contained comments about institutionalization of Cooperative Alliance activities, which informants believed should occur slowly and be based on broad-based support.

Another category within the partnership framework domain included comments about its smooth and successful functioning, which informants viewed as due to "greater cooperation," "less protectionism of individual agendas," and hard work among all key stakeholders to help the group identify common goals and learn to function together. At the same time, however, the partnership foundation was not viewed as static; rather, informants spoke of its evolution and of changes in contributions among individual partners. Some of these changes were seen as a natural extension of the project's growth, but others were due to organizational or personnel changes within participating organizations. In general, informants expressed little concern about these latter changes, as long as organizational commitment to the project was maintained, although they did acknowledge the "start up" delays caused when new JPAC members joined the group. In all, informants' comments about change suggested that they perceived (a) change as inevitable, (b) certain changes to be more potentially dangerous than others, and (c) the partnership framework to be strong enough and flexible enough to accommodate changes.

The second domain, evaluation, included comments about project success. In addition, informants acknowledged the importance of the rigorous evaluation plan for the project and identified several uses for evaluation data, such as formative refinements and internal and external dissemination.

Comments within the "people" domain described characteristics of good partners, ways individuals interacted as part of the larger group, and methods for encouraging continued individual involvement. The value of human resources was acknowledged in the "resources" domain, as well, but comments centered upon (a) fiscal constraints within participating agencies, and (b) the desire to find additional resources so that the project could be expanded. Informants suggested no solutions for these problems, but they did identify them as pressing concerns. The final two domains focused on project goals and specifics. With regard to the former, informants believed continued, consensual focus on project goals was critical, although they did acknowledge that certain priorities might shift over time or that either purposeful of serendipitous goal expansion might occur. None of these issues related to project goals was viewed as problematic; in fact, expansion and enrichment were viewed as project strengths.

The final domain, which involved comments related to project impact, included reflections about the effect of unanticipated events or factors over which the informants felt no control(e.g., possible staffing changes, delays in computer network installations).

A comparison of informants' perceptions across the two years revealed changes in both breadth and depth. For example, Year 2 domains related to evaluation and specific aspects of the project were not present in Year 1 data. A change in complexity of perceptions was also noted, even within domains present in both data sets. Similarities were also apparent: Informants valued communication and strong leadership, and they believed change to be a "given" for the partnership.

Critical Issues: Year 3

Method

All members of the Joint Partnership Advisory Council (JPAC) were again interviewed at the close of the 1992-93 school year. Thirteen individuals had been involved since the beginning of the project; three were new JPAC members who replaced former representatives from their community agency. Their interviews became data for this study. These informants represented the CPS, IBM, and KSU personnel directly responsible for the project (N=7) and one serving only on the JPAC (N=1), community agencies (e.g., libraries, museums; N=6), business (N=1), and the state board of regents (N=1).

Interviews were conducted individually, by trained research assistants, at the convenience of the persons being interviewed. Interviews, which ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length, were tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The semi-structured interview questions focused on informants' perceptions

of project goals, their views of the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership, and comments about their personal involvement in the project. Questions seeking their ideas about key ingredients leading to or barriers preventing success of the project were particularly important for the current study.

Three of the researchers collaborated in the data reduction and analysis process. The process first involved identifying data congruent with the research goals, a procedure facilitated by the software program Ethnograph (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988). The entire corpus of interview data was searched for portions relating to the focus of the study. Pertinent quotations from the interviews, along with enough of the conversational context to understand the quotation, were coded for subsequent analysis.

These reduced data were then combed for patterns or regularities (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Inductive analysis uncovered tentative domains, which were refined through the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Results

Analysis uncovered four domains that accounted for informants' comments about critical aspects of the partnership. Table 1 displays their frequency and distribution across types of informants; these same "types" are indicated parenthetically in the discussion of results that follows. Remarks about the partnership framework and people together accounted for 71% of

all comments; clearly these are major issues for all informants. Although CAGE personnel (CPS-CAGE, IBM-CAGE, KSU-CAGE) accounted for less than half of the informants, they supplied 55% of the comments about the partnership framework. These data support an earlier finding (Padak, et. al., 1993) that those closest to a partnership may have more ideas about its framework. Community JPAC members also accounted for less than half of the informants, but they supplied 50% of the comments in the people domain. This suggests community members are most interested in partnership roles.

Partnership Framework

As in previous studies, informants clearly viewed the partnership framework as a key ingredient to success. Three general categories emerge from analysis of their comments: evolution, communication, and collaboration.

Comments on project evolution addressed goals, commitment of the partners and agencies, and support for the institutionalization process. Although informants agreed that the partnership had been successful, they saw its future success as the critical issue. In the words of one informant, "Issues become no longer 'is the project working or isn't it' but 'what happens to it in the future'" (community).

Informants maintained consensus on project goals but acknowledged some shifting of goals over time. "I'm seeing changes in some of these [goals] happening as the project moves on" (community). This shifting of goals was viewed as natural.

"I think as the project evolves, so have the goals..." (KSU-CAGE). Informants agreed that institutionalization of the project would become a major focus:

> Because we couldn't get those extra funds, we had to turn our attention to what was doable that would be beneficial, that would fit with the resources we were likely to get. That's why for the year four continuation, we added a goal that has to do with institutionalization...our success in achieving institutionalization in the Cleveland Public Schools, I believe, is going to be a major focus for us this last year of the project. (KSU-CAGE)

Another informant saw the new goal giving more ownership to the schools themselves: "From what I see of CAGE, it seems to be evolving itself, which is to put the schools more in charge" (community). Informants felt that successful institutionalization with project efforts becoming "a part of practice" (board of regents) was critical to project success, "otherwise it becomes just merely an innovation that dies away" (community).

The consonance of project goals with larger reform efforts at the city, state, and national level was seen as another key ingredient for success. "I think the most important thing probably has been the extent to which you look at your goals in connection with Vision 21 [CPS restructuring plan]" (community). One informant appealed to the partnership to "see the CAGE mission as the mission of Goals 2000, Ohio 2000, Vision 21" (CPS-

CAGE). Some informants saw potential barriers posed by institutional bureaucracy become opportunities because of the interface of the project with school reform (CPS-JPAC, community).

A second critical issue related to successful project evolution addressed the need for sustained commitment of the three partners and the JPAC (CPS-CAGE, IBM-CAGE, KSU-CAGE, community, business). Informants expressed some concern over continued commitment from IBM: "I don't know that IBM can, will, or will want to continue that relationship into the future" (KSU-CAGE). The need for strong commitment from the schools was also voiced: "I think that the Cleveland Public Schools part of it has got to be very, very strong from an ownership standpoint in order to allow the program to continue" (IBM-CAGE). Yet another informant suggested the project be underwritten by the university through budgeting in the general fund (CPS-JPAC).

Comments pertaining to the sustained commitment of the JPAC were made by all types of informants. Although the changing faces at JPAC meetings were viewed by some informants as problematic (KSU-CAGE, business), the JPAC was able to sustain itself through the changes. Informants valued the evolving role of the JPAC and suggested future changes be examined as well (CPS-CAGE, IBM-CAGE, KSU-CAGE). One informant summarized,

> So the JPAC is not a static entity. Issues constantly evolved to mirror what was going on in the grant; and so one of the challenges is for the JPAC membership to change to

reflect the activities that the grant is involved with at this point in time. (KSU-CAGE)

Informants identified a third key ingredient for successful evolution of the partnership: support for teachers in their use of technology (KSU-CAGE, CPS-JPAC, community, board of regents). One informant said teachers were "very ready and they have already made the shift mentally to make the change, and then the technology fails them, and I think that is real frustrating" (KSU-CAGE). Another informant elaborated on the need for continued support to keep the technology current: "Computer technology...has really grown dramatically over the life of this project and...the technology we put in place in the schools is ...going to be too old..." (KSU-CAGE).

Comments about the importance of maintaining communication formed a second category within the partnership framework domain. Informants saw communication as both a strength and weakness of the partnership. One informant felt the JPAC was kept "informed through newsletters, minutes, and the on-going meetings" (board of regents). Another informant felt the partners "don't have to have as much communication because we are all on the same wave length now and I feel real comfortable with that" (KSU-CAGE).

Weaker aspects of communication involved timely notice of meetings, orientation of new JPAC members, and special needs due to the institutionalization process. Late notices on meetings during the third year of the partnership were identified as a weakness by some informants (IBM-CAGE, community). Changes

within JPAC member agencies (e.g., resignations, reassignment to other projects) brought new members to the JPAC who felt a need for project history (community). CAGE personnel expressed concern with maintaining communication during the process of institutionalization with no one having full time CAGE responsibility. "It appears...there needs to be, on any type of project this complex, some key person that is available to field questions, or to direct information, or to find out answers when answers need to be had..." (KSU-CAGE). Another partner gave this advice, "Focus on making sure that communications occur, and that everybody is apprised of what is happening" (IBM-CAGE).

The third category within comments about the partnership framework pertained to collaboration. Informants expressed the continuing need to build relationships among people with diverse interests and expertise but who also share common goals (CPS-CAGE, KSU-CAGE, CPS-JPAC, community). Informants remarked on the high degree of trust and respect that the partners have developed (KSU-CAGE, board of regents). Another informant felt the collaboration among the partners was stronger than that of the JPAC: "we have such faith in our ability to deal with problems that arise...I'm not sure the same is true of the JPAC" (KSU-CAGE). Yet another informant described the collaboration further:

> It has never been "you listen while I tell you" but always "you may listen while I tell you, but then we'll talk about and develop things together." It's been a functioning

partnership...those meetings...are in truth participatory. (KSU-CAGE)

Overall, informants felt the partnership framework was sound and their efforts now focused on the continuation of project successes within the Cleveland Schools. Major concerns involved support for teachers as they implement the project, especially funding for technological support.

People

Analysis of comments within this domain yielded four categories describing individual involvement with the partnership: ownership, attendance, roles, and activity. Community informants, supplying more than half of all comments within this domain, expressed the most concern with people issues.

Remarks in "ownership" included observations of the sincere dedication and commitment of people involved in the project (IBM-CAGE, community, board of regents). One informant felt a reason for ownership was the "sense of being part of something important that helps others" (community). Another informant viewed the continued ownership of those most involved in the project as necessary for the overall success of the partnership (KSU-CAGE). The same informant discussed reasons for loss of ownership over time:

I think people get diverted. They have other projects that are placed in front of them. They may be less vested in this project because their thing that they're particularly

interested in has already been accomplished or possibly is no longer a major focus. Or simply, they are just at another place in their career now. (KSU-CAGE)

In the second category, comments on attendance were made by nearly every type of informant. Some simply stated they had missed several successive meetings (community, business). One informant expressed disappointment with the attendance at JPAC meetings:

> There's been only one JPAC meeting this spring, but I was very disappointed in the attendance. Some of the people in the first couple of years of the project I expected to see at those meetings and looked forward to chatting with whenever we had a chance to get together simply were not there. (KSU-CAGE)

Reasons offered for poor attendance were busy schedules and late notice of meeting dates (community, board of regents).

A wide array of roles was identified through comments in the third category. Although organizational restructuring had brought new faces to the partner table, the partnership continued to function successfully. One informant attributed this to clarity of roles: "The players may change but the roles and responsibilities are real clear" (KSU-CAGE).

Informants discussed the leadership role. They felt effective leadership included organizational and planning skills along with the ability to recognize talents of others and facilitate their use (community). A change in the project

director at the beginning of year three had caused some concern over continuity of leadership; but one informant found it "has not been a factor at all because the program continues to thrive" (CPS-JPAC). Leadership, then, may hinge less on one person and more on whether it is a role that is shared.

In addition to comments about leadership, informants talked about their role as advisor. One described this role as personally satisfying (board of regents). Another described a dual role: "myself as an advisor, where I can help, and as a student, where I can learn" (community).

Remarks in the fourth category conveyed a willingness to engage in specific activities within the partnership, beyond mere attendance at meetings, and a desire to have talents used more extensively (community, business). As one informant advised, "Don't be afraid to ask for a little more actual work" (community). Another informant suggested the partnership consider ways members "can actually do something that's going to impact the success of the project as a whole" (community).

In summary, comments made by community informants indicated ownership; they felt they were receiving something back from participation in the project and took satisfaction in being part of an effort to help others. They expressed a strong interest in more active involvement in project specifics (e.g., staff development, alternative learning sites).

Evaluation

Two general categories emerged from analysis of comments in this domain. The first category addressed the findings themselves. Some participants conveyed a feeling of being too close to the project to appreciate its magnitude:

> I travel in literacy circles and people say, "Wendy, what are you involved with?" and I talk about this project. It's something that causes peoples' jaws to drop open. I don't think we know how special, how remarkable, how innovative this project is. (KSU-CAGE)

Another informant described the project as "a model that can be used not just in the CAGE project but throughout Cleveland Public Schools" (KSU-CAGE). In evaluating the findings, one informant advised, "It's important for all of us to be honest in how we see it as working, so that the information can be valuable for others who want to undertake similar partnerships" (community).

The second category within this domain addressed the importance of disseminating the project findings both internally in the Cleveland Schools and externally to the wider community. Nearly all types of informants supplied comments in this domain. In addition to making general statements that advocated reaching "the widest audience of teachers and classrooms as possible" (CPS-JPAC), informants identified the need for a "communications network so that people know what you are doing. If they don't know that you're doing good, it's real hard for them to get behind your effort" (community).

Internal dissemination was viewed as critical to the success of institutionalization:

> I would like to see all of the partners and JPAC continue to try to publicize more of the good things that are being done, particularly inside Cleveland Public Schools where the ownership is going to have to really take place. (IBM-CAGE)

Another informant felt "it's important to...make sure that people who are aware of CAGE are participating in the implementation of plans for Vision 21" (community).

Another reason given for internal dissemination is the encouraging effect of project successes: "I think other people...those who are currently involved and those who might potentionally be involved, will be encouraged by the positive feedback that you're getting from the study" (board of regents). The same informant advised that the "teachers have to benefit from what CAGE is discovering if it's going to improve the quality of education," and further described how findings influence the project:

> As a research project, you are already...starting to discover some things. And your discovery is influencing...what you are doing, your strategy, and you are also providing feedback to the school district and to the teachers, so that they can be influenced positively. (board of regents)

This funneling of information back into the project was identified as a strength: "As you are collecting, you are interpreting that data, and you are turning it right back. It's almost as if you're making money and putting it back into the business" (CPS-JPAC).

Informants not only agreed on the need for internal sharing of successes; they also agreed that external dissemination was equally important. One community informant described a "media blackout in the Cleveland area in terms of anything really positive happening in Cleveland Public Schools" and felt this project was a "positive issue that can be pressed" (community). Another informant thought the project could

> help make believers out of adults. I'm not only talking about teachers, but I'm talking about people in the community who have certain views or stereotypes about our children, and they want to use excuses and say they come from single parent homes and on and on and on, and that has not anything to do with a child who comes to school. (CPS-JPAC)

The need for external dissemination extends far beyond the local community, however; informants thought partnership findings had implications for teacher education across the nation (KSU-CAGE, board of regents). One informant believed "that we have an obligation to share...so that colleagues throughout the country can learn from what we've done" (KSU-CAGE).

Generally, informants agreed on the importance of evaluating and disseminating project findings both within the Cleveland Public Schools and without the wider community. They felt project success would encourage current participants and inform others involved in educational reform nationwide.

Individual Organizations

The third year of the partnership brought substantial changes within the partner organizations. These changes posed interesting challenges. CAGE personnel accounted for 78% of the comments in this domain, with community informants supplying the remaining 22%. Analysis of the comments yielded two general categories. Remarks pertaining to the culture of an organization, in this instance the Cleveland Public Schools, formed one category. The majority of comments in this category described the existence of multiple programs running simultaneously within the schools but with little or no coordination of effort and only minimal funding; informants viewed this condition as a potential barrier to project success (IBM-CAGE, community).

Comments about organizational change comprise the second category within this domain. Reorganization within the Cleveland Public Schools was identified as a critical issue concerning project success: "whether or not Cleveland can maintain its commitment with its new plans to reinvent itself" was one question posed (KSU-CAGE). The same informant described potential barriers to success:

> This type of institutional change that Cleveland is making presents some real problems for us for retraining, actually initial training, for new people who are walking in and haven't had an opportunity to participate in the program. (KSU-CAGE)

Institutional changes within the university were also considered. One informant questioned "as Bill and I move from one department to another...whether all of that's going to even out to enable us to spend as much time on this as we need" (KSU-CAGE).

Changes were not always viewed as a barrier, however. Another informant focused on those that had been successfully accommodated (e.g., writing a new goal of institutionalization):

> So you know, there is always the chance that it is going to continue to change. But I'm a lot more comfortable than I was at this time last year and a lot more certain that at least what we plan for this year probably will take place. (KSU-CAGE)

In summary, informants recognized that existing conditions within the school culture and organizational changes within partner institutions present potential barriers to project success. They also expressed confidence in the ability of the partnership to meet the challenges posed by change.

Discussion

Summary and Conclusions: Year 3

Taken together, the domains and categories that capture informants' Year 3 interview responses convey their emerging sense of the complexity of this school reform project. Comments about the partnership framework itself and the people involved in both the JPAC and implementation of project activities in classrooms accounted for nearly 3/4 of the data for the study. This finding alone underscores the importance of efforts to study how partnerships function.

Moreover, as in Year 2, these data reveal that those closest to the functioning of a partnership (i.e., CPS, IBM, KSU) have the most ideas about critical issues. To some extent, this is an expected finding; after all, those closest to a project undoubtedly spend more time working on it and thinking about it. Still, this finding points to the need for articulation and communication among partners, particularly when a smaller group is responsible for day-to-day functioning and a larger group serves in an advisory role. Moreover, this finding speaks to the need to acknowledge the likelihood of diverse perspectives as partnership efforts are evaluated.

One theme that permeates domains and categories for the Year 3 interviews is change. Informants commented about changes in the focus of project goals, changes in project personnel, and changes in JPAC membership. None of these changes was perceived as dangerous to either the partnership or the project. Instead

change was viewed as natural, an evolution, something to be expected, and something that both the project and the partnership could easily withstand. Informants did have ideas about why and how change was and could continue to be tolerated, however: maintain a central focus, communicate frequently, maintain clear roles, and engender continued commitment.

The notion of "ownership" is another theme apparent across domains. Informants spoke of the dedication and creativity of teachers involved in the project as well as the importance of their own investment, both as individuals and as representatives of their agencies. Communication, often in the form of the dissemination of evaluation information, was viewed as critical to supporting and encouraging ownership. Informants believed that such sharing could promote continued commitment among project participants, serve as the basis for making project refinements, and nurture pride among all project participants.

A Three-Year View

Each year of this 3-year effort has shed new light on the central question for the studies: What do those engaged in a partnership see as the key ingredients in developing and maintaining successful partnership efforts? Table 2 summarizes major findings across the studies. Themes arising from analysis of the Year 1 interviews suggested that informants saw partnerships as dynamic, evolving entities that feature sharing and collaboration among persons of equal status. To a limited

extent, results lent support to previous research, which has identified careful communication (Shaklee et al., 1991), active involvement, and acknowledgement of personal and institutional identities (Intriligator, 1986) as critical components of successful partnerships. More important, however, results pointed to a new focus in the study of the partnership process: relationships and interactions among those involved. After a few months of involvement informants clearly believed that knowing one another was critical to success of the partnership. Further, understanding and appreciating differences in perspectives and in interaction styles emerged as major themes.

Results of the Year 2 study revealed that descriptions of partnerships that ignore the possibility of change may be overly simplistic. Our informants' perceptions did change with increased experience. For this partnership, at least, the assumption of homeostasis would have been erroneous. On the other hand, results confirmed several speculations found in the professional literature, notably the continued focus on process and relationships (Grobe, 1990; Pazant, 1992) and increased attention to institutionalization (Fullan & Miles, 1992; Lieberman, 1992; VanDeVen, 1976).

These findings, in combination with results of the present study, enable several conclusions to be drawn about this educational partnership. At the very least, the conclusions raise some interesting hypotheses that could serve as the basis for future research. The conclusions may also form the

beginnings of a grounded theory of the growth and development of educational partnerships in general.

1. When a partnership is initiated, partners "come to the table" as individuals, with their own personal and organizational mind sets. A critical initial task for a partnership, then, is to focus on two kinds of learning. One, naturally, is to help partners understand the nature and scope of the reform effort they are being asked to support. The second, which is equally important, is to provide opportunities for individuals to learn about one another. Partners need to address questions such as: Who are we? What interests do we have, both as individuals and as representatives of our organizations, in the focus of this reform effort? What shall our partnership be? Can we trust each other? How do we need to work together to foster success for the partnership?

Finding answers to these questions may take some time, at least several months. When satisfactory answers are found, however, partners demonstrate an investment in both the project and the partnership and are able to shift their attention to issues related to implementation. In the case of this partnership, the investment was neither ego-driven nor entrepreneurial; rather it was a genuine commitment to all aspects of the effort.

2. Some perspectives about key issues related to success remain constant over several years of involvement with a partnership. Our informants consistently indicated that they

valued careful communication and strong leadership as vehicles for maintaining relationships. Moreover, they acknowledged that diversity among partners lent strength to the effort, and they believed that continued focus on project goals was an effective means of sustaining coherence in the face of the natural evolutions in both partnerships and the projects they support. These issues may be foundational for the success of any partnership effort.

3. The notion of change must be considered as partnerships are supported. The theme of change permeates all three data sets. Informants believed change to be a given in this particular reform effort. They also maintained that adaptability to accommodate change is critical to continued success. Keeping key players "at the table" over the life of a project is one way to ensure that inevitable changes will be successfully accommodated. Intraorganizational communication is another.

4. Issues of concern about a partnership or the reform that it supports appear to vary according to role. With regard to the partnership, our studies find that those closest to its functioning had the most ideas about it. On the other hand, those farther away from the core of the partnership had fewer notions, and their ideas were more likely to be erroneous or to represent a narrow view. Both research about and evaluations of educational partnerships should seek to address the likelihood that degree of involvement in a particular effort may be related to the depth, breadth, and accuracy of perceptions.

In these studies, concerns ranged from the wholistic (e.g., reform within the entire school system) to the narrow (e.g., frustrations with technology). In general, individuals' concerns were related to their roles within the project: teachers were concerned about technology, project support staff with supporting teachers, the JPAC with school system reform, and the smaller group of working partners with both classroom and systemic issues. These varied views and concomitant concerns are all important, of course. Again, research and evaluation of partnership efforts should acknowledge the likelihood of differences in concerns according to role.

Conclusion

In this study and our previous work, we have sought an "insiders' view" of the partnership process. As Sirotnik (1988) points out, only this sort of critical inquiry about a specific partnership can reveal if it is proceeding well, by making explicit "the assumptions, beliefs and agenda forming the foundation of partnership efforts" (p. 175). Attempts to understand the process from the perspectives of those involved will, collectively, provide a socio-cultural view of this important vehicle for educational reform.

Thus, the need seems clear to document and describe the partnership process as well as its activities (NAPE, 1991; Sirotnik, 1988). These inquiries should be built on the assumption that meaning is socially constructed and context

dependent. Moreover, designs should acknowledge the likelihood that perceptions will change as a partnership matures. Future inquiries should also be designed to capture the complexity of partnership interactions: "Education is a complex system, and its reform is even more complex. Even if one considers only seemingly simple, first-order changes, the number of components and their interrelationships are staggering" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 746).

The collaborative process inherent in partnerships has the potential to foster a genuine sense of shared responsibility for education and educational reform. Additionally, partners bring both conceptual and pragmatic strength to reform efforts. For these reasons, among others, the likelihood is great that partnerships will continue to be a factor in educational reform efforts. It is, therefore, critical that the research community endeavor to detect and verify those elements that foster sustained, effective partnerships.

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Table 1

Distribution of Comments by Domain and Type of Informant

	Type of Informant				
Domain	CPS/KSU/IBM CAGE	CPS JPAC	Community	Business	Board of Regents
Partnership Framework	34	4	19	2	3
People	8	1	15	2	4
Evaluation	11	5	5		7
Individual Organization	7		2		

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Table 2

Year 1-Year 2-Year 3 Comparisons within Domains

Domain	Data Set		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Partnership framework	Authentic participation; communication; processes for decision-making; expect dissension and change	Foundation established; common perceptions of goals, roles; expect evolving priorities; flexible framework to accommodate change; institutionalization critical	Sound framework; focus on the future; evolution of goals; sustained commitment; support for institutionalization; communication important; continuing need for collaboration
People	Individuals: personality, power Group: relationships, trust	Individuals: willing, trusting, flexible, determined Group: diverse, cohesive, committed	Personal ownership; attendance important; variety of roles; willingness to become actively involved
Evaluation	None	Complex: definitions of "success," outside factors, need to "stand back;" variety of functions	Findings provide a model; need to be honest; internal and external dissemination critical
Individual organizations	None	None	Factor of school culture; impact of organizational change
Resources	People, facilities, material, money	Money to sustain and expand; human	None
Goals	Investment and understanding	Consensus and focus; goals will shift and vary over time and across participants; expansion desirable	None
Project Specifics	None	Impact of changes; importance of teacher variables	None

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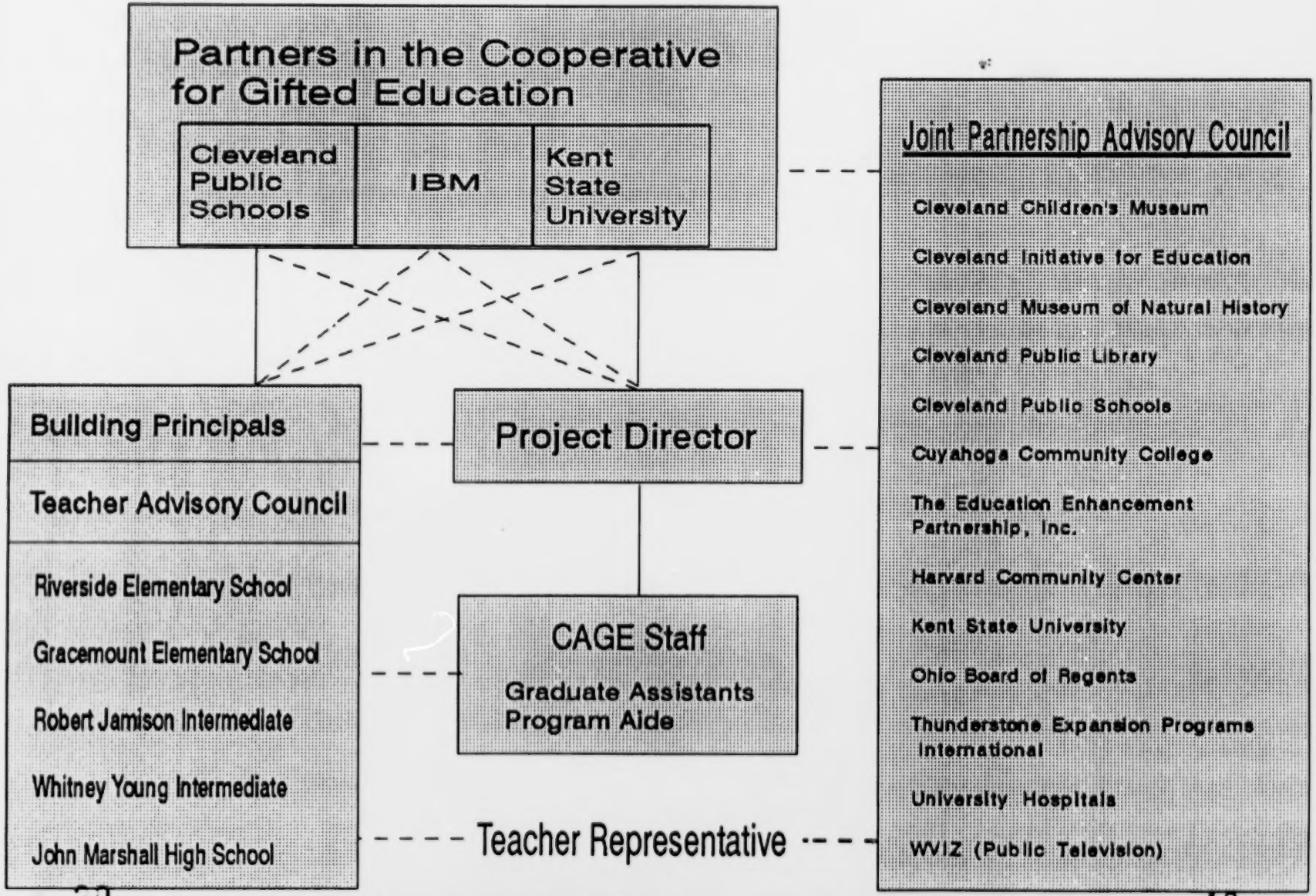
Figure 1. Cooperative Alliance for Gifted Education



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